

British Torture at Bad Nenndorf

[Johannes Heyne](#)

Bad Nenndorf is a bathing resort in the fringe of the uplands of the River Weser's watershed where people with joint ailments are treated with mud baths and soaks in sulfurous waters. On the grounds of the spa suffused with sulfur fumes stands a stately mud-bath house from the 19th Century. At the entrance, cure-seekers are greeted by the goddess Hygeia. Late in the 1920s, the bathhouse was extended into a massive complex with innumerable bathing huts.

War-Criminal Headquarters

After the end of the war, Bad Nenndorf wound up in the British Zone of occupation. In violation of the Hague Convention for Land Warfare, the occupiers subjugated the civil order and persecuted civilians, in particular political leaders, of the conquered land. In the Potsdam Protocol of August 2, 1945, the following is proclaimed:[\[1\]](#)

War criminals and those who have participated in planning or carrying out Nazi enterprises involving or resulting in atrocities or war crimes shall be arrested and brought to judgment. Nazi leaders, influential Nazi supporters and high officials of Nazi organizations and institutions and any other persons dangerous to the occupation or its objectives shall be arrested and interned.

In accordance therewith, the area surrounding the mud-bath house was designated a Civil Internment Camp[\[2\]](#) in early August 1945. 1200 residents of the area had to vacate their houses. The area was fenced off with barbed wire. The mud-bath house received a new function: registration center and prison for Germans who were to be charged as war criminals. In the bathing huts, the fixtures were removed and the tubs in the floors cemented over. From this resulted functional prison cells with tiled walls.

NSDAP functionaries, members of the SS, officers from every branch of the Wehrmacht, diplomats and industrialists were confined in the cells in order to be "prepared" for the coming war-criminal trials. But here also were kept defecting Soviet officers and mere illegal immigrants who were suspected of being spies for the Soviet Union—that same Soviet Union that was still an ally of Great Britain in 1945 and 1946.

The guard staff consisted of members of a British punishment company, who hoped by faithful performance in this assignment to recover the ranks that they had been stripped of.



The mud-bath house at Bad Nenndorf

Report of Victim Oswald Pohl

There are only two reports of conditions in the mud-bath house at Bad Nenndorf. One report comes from the head of the *Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt* of the SS (Economic and Administrative Main Office), SS General Oswald Pohl, who was confined for a time at Camp Bad Nenndorf at the end of May 1945. In the last communication before his execution, he wrote: [\[3\]](#)

“Our treatment by the English in Bad Nenndorf was inhuman. I was confined alone in a cell in which there were four plank beds. My handcuffs were not removed in the locked and watched cell neither by day nor by night, neither when I ate nor when I attended to bodily needs. Indeed, at night with my hands still tied, I was bound by yet another fetter to the posts of the plank bed so that I could not move and for that reason was unable to sleep. I was hustled to my interviews down a long corridor to the interrogation room, during which some of the warders pushed me from behind, and others were to either side, who occasionally knocked me down with tripping and kicks. In front of the door of the interrogation room, I was forced to run in place until the beginning of the interview, which the warders forced to an ever-higher tempo by kicks in the ass and curses and threats. All this happened under the gaze of the sergeant posted at the scene. The way back to my cell consisted of the same gauntlet, wherein I was often knocked down by tripping, and ran headlong into the wall. On the second day, a chair was brought into my cell. I had to sit down to be 'shaved.' Even though I was shackled, two warders held me down on the chair while a third pulled my head back unmercifully by the hair so that I fell backward several times.

A fourth warder smeared my face with something that burned like acid while he slapped my face back and forth. After he had thoroughly 'lathered' me, he scraped my face with a dull razor so roughly that my blood dripped onto my jacket. During this procedure, his helpers continually spewed violent threats and imprecations in my face.

Finally, as though on command, everyone in the cell—there must have been eight or ten of them—set upon me, yanked me up, and pummeled me blindly, bound and defenseless as I was. Blows of fists rained down on my head and kicks hit me in every part of my body. Tottering on my legs, I careened from corner to corner until I collapsed unconscious from a massive blow or kick to the area of the stomach.

When I came to, all was quiet in my cell. I lay on a plank bed and I noticed that two doctors were attending me, one of whom took my pulse. My handcuffs were off. I passed out again.

I was only able to guess how long all this had taken after night had fallen. Since it was almost dark when I woke up, it must have been around eight o'clock; the beating must have begun around five. Someone handed me a cup of strong coffee and then I was brought to my last interview, this time without having to run a gauntlet. This interrogation lasted until long past midnight. The interrogating officer, noting my condition, inquired as to how it had come about. I gave him a brief account of the above. He stood up outraged and apologized in the name of the British Army. Then he left the room for a long while to—as he assured me—arrange with the commandant for punishment of the perpetrators. The affray had caused me the loss of an incisor and a molar.

The next morning at 7 o'clock I was transported, bound, in a truck to Nuremberg.”

Another Report

The second report comes from the hand of the Nenndorfer Heinrich Steinmeyer and his wife Marie. The report was published in 1952 in the magazine Quick^[4] and further circulates in Bad Nenndorf in various reproductions. Heinrich Steinmeyer was an inmate of the prison and died in 1948 from the effects of his imprisonment.

“British Interrogation Camp Bad Nenndorf 1945 – 1947

[...] the bathhouse [was] hermetically sealed away from the rest of the world. Except for the British officers, who automatically had clearance, and those British warders to whom clearance had been issued, no one knew of the existence of any such prison as this one. The Germans, of course, least of all, since whoever was consigned to this inferno was immediately rendered mute, invisible, obliterated.

No reports ever came out to next of kin from Bad Nenndorf. The British authorities, who were situated in Herford, gave information neither to next of kin, to the Red Cross which had been tipped off, nor even to the Quakers, who wished mercifully to provide aid. They even denied, when specific identification of a prisoner was submitted, that the man was even in Nenndorf...

[The tiled walls of the cells] became [...] a great source of fun for the British watchstanders, and a source of misery for the prisoners because the soldiers systematically smeared the walls with feces and the prisoners then had to clean the walls spotlessly with their fingers or a toothbrush. The individual cells were never heated and in the bitter cold winter of 1946-47, the water faucet in the dayroom froze up. The floors and walls were icy cold. One plank bed. No sack of straw. Two sheets. And all night long, the electric light was on, and every hour the guard noisily opened the door and two times every night came officer's rounds. The prisoners had to get up, stand still and give their number. For twenty minutes, one had to hear the slamming of the doors, the tramping of the guards, the bellowing of the accompanying soldiers.

This Is How They Passed Their Days ...

The guard staff were a hand-picked motley crew of thugs who probably possessed but little feeling, and certainly never any sympathy whatsoever. They were all members of a penal company who had to atone for a criminal offense, and here worked out their obligated tours of duty. And they made their remaining time as entertaining and pleasant for themselves as they possibly could. Now and then they had wild disputes among themselves and the prisoners then heard some of the grievances the boys nursed, and they realized in whose hands they lay. Sodomy, thievery, fraud, burglary, attempted murder, desertion. The threat to the prisoners lay in the fact that for every one of these brigands, a shining reward lay in the offing. A fierce struggle for survival drove them back and forth.

Each had earlier held a military rank. And each had a chance to win their honor back. But to the detriment of the inmates, this opportunity lay in subjecting the inmates to the roughest and most-brutal treatment possible. For this reason, the boys worked up the most-sadistic, private methods each of them could by which to torture the prisoners.

Every prisoner at Nenndorf reported that, after having fallen asleep with great effort, he was then awakened in great disturbance. In between were days, one like the other.

Rising time was 4:30. If the sergeant was in a bad mood, he came around at 3:30 or 4:00. The prisoners stumbled out of bed—that is, from their plank beds. Five minutes later, both sheets were to be drawn

drum-tight across the bed. During the day, none was to sit, nor to lie. If any poor sod happened to sit or lie for a second or two—denial of food.

The day consisted of pacing back and forth in their cells from 4 in the morning to 9:30 at night, or standing against the wall. They stood against the wall until they felt they would go crazy.

Every prisoner knew within minutes of his arrival at Nenndorf that he was lost here, since 5 minutes after his arrival he stood in the intake room, where a sergeant tore the clothes from his body. It may be said of the Nenndorf garb that every arrival looked like a clown—jacket too small, pants too wide or too narrow, and everything stiff with dirt. Laundry was never done. In the issuance of shoes, the sergeant in charge was not satisfied unless the size of shoes issued was at least four sizes too large. That sounds harmless enough, but it gave rise to unimaginable torture. There were no shoelaces, our shoes just hung on our feet, and since every step we took outside our cells had to be on the double, we constantly stumbled and fell, the while driven onward with screams and pokes with rifle butts. After 3-4 hours: weak tea and perhaps a little porridge. After this, standing or pacing in the cell until one again thought oneself driven to madness.

The Man with the Uppercut

Before the evening officer's rounds, we had to take off our jackets, pants, and shoes and lay them in front of our cells, standing behind them in shirt and underpants. The commandant of Nenndorf, whose name no one will ever forget, Colonel Stevens, took pleasure in conducting the evening harangue. Rotund with broad shoulders and a face that was always dark red and many campaign ribbons on his chest, he looked askance at the pitiable, half-frozen forms in their underclothes with his small, cold eyes. Now and then he would randomly shout at one or another. This inarticulate yelp contained a question, which the prisoner invariably could not understand. Colonel Stevens would never wait for an answer, but rather immediately strike the man under the chin with his fist.

Then began a vicious ceremony under the gaze of the watchstanders. As soon as this tour was over, two or three prisoners were fetched from their cells. They had to sluice water, that had been placed specifically for this fiendish routine, down the long corridor and just so that the insensate bodies of the prisoners were soaked in the filthy froth. So their clothes, if they could be called clothes, lay until dawn in the swill until they awoke and had to clutch the totally besmirched and frozen rags against their bodies.

Of course there were interviews and interrogations. A huge number of witnesses have testified that British officers punched and kicked German army officers, officers of the Waffen SS and party functionaries mercilessly until they received the testimony they desired. Every prisoner in his cell either held his ears shut or trembled in every fiber of his body or ran uncontrollably back and forth in his narrow space whenever the deafening yelling, screaming, howling, crying and babbling of the tortured prisoners inescapably echoed down the corridor from the interrogation rooms, punctuated by the ferocious curses of the British interrogation officers.

Experiences in Hell

SS Obersturmbannführer Dr. Oebsger-Roeder was beaten unconscious by several British officers on Good Friday 1946, such that he had to be carried back to his cell. It took months for his grave injuries to heal.

SS Sturmbannführer Dr. Hahnke, chief of legations in the cultural-political section of the foreign ministry was so badly beaten up that for the rest of his life he had a game leg.

The last head of the film department of the propaganda ministry, Parbel, not only was flogged upon his arrival, but was consigned by a British major, a former German, to the feared and notorious Cell 12. In this place, buckets of water were continually poured so that the prisoner, barefoot in only a shirt and pants, had to either stand or pace back and forth all night in the wet. The poor soul spent fully eight days and nights in this hell and his condition even moved the minimal pity of one of the warders, who secretly took him out, gave him shoes and let him rest for an hour on the seat of the privy.

Captain Langham presided over most of the beating incidents. His name is unforgettable to Nenndorfers. He made sure that the unconscious were taken to the shower, there to be revived so that the beatings could resume.

Most of the torturers were sergeants. It speaks for the gallows humor of the prisoners that in the midst of this misery, they made up nicknames for one and another of these hangmen. One of these was called Henry VIII because he was bursting at the seams and continually roaring with a purple face. Another was called Red-eye for reasons that require no explanation. Another was called Smiley, and he was the worst of the beasts since he would appear in their cells in the middle of the night wearing an ice-cold smile, sweep them out of their bunks and make them do strenuous exercises until they were half-broken.

Escape attempts were hopeless, but nonetheless two prisoners who lived in the day room tried it: one of them got away; the other was caught near the camp in the search that ensued the detection of their absence, in which the entire guard staff took part. The unfortunate was interrogated at length and was so beaten that he finally gave away who had supplied him with civilian clothes. This was a miner who worked during the day in Barsinghausen, and on whose door the fugitive knocked one night. As the miner hesitated, his wife said to him, 'Help him, for Christ's sake.' The miner was detained a few weeks and what this man, an old Social Democrat, had to undergo in that period was cruel in the extreme. He had to throw up at every meal; by the time of his release he also was a complete wreck. The escapee himself was beaten thoroughly and then his handcuffs were chained to the shackles on his legs so that to get around, he had to walk or stagger completely bent over. Many saw him in this condition.

No Nenndorfer will ever forget the British 'military doctor' assigned to look after them, Captain Smith. A haggard, grizzled, emaciated figure that personified resignation. He would glance into each cell, listen absent-mindedly when anyone complained about this or that, and then growl, 'No personal remark.' (Nothing to report.)

Anyone who had a toothache was entirely neglected, and many had toothaches from being struck repeatedly in the mouth. There was no dentist. The dentures of Dr. H. C. Winkler, that venerable Mayor Winkler, who had directed the film industry and financed other major enterprises of the Third Reich, broke when he was thrown into jail at the age of 72. He could no longer chew. Captain Smith listened to the old man, who finally said he would starve to death. Smith responded drily, 'Then you'll starve to death.'

Oh, You Holy Christmastime

Anyone who spent Christmastime 1945 in Bad Nenndorf will never forget it their whole life.

The prisoners employed in the kitchen had scrimped and expended the most strenuous efforts to produce a little cheer on that evening. They had managed to produce ginger bread from their meager resources. And on that Christmas Eve, a faint glimmer of light in the thick fog of mutual hostility appeared. One of the guards, of Polish descent, visited each cell and to its occupant wished a 'Merry Christmas' in his heavily accented English.

His own people had received gross mistreatment in the war, perhaps he himself, maybe even by some of those that night confined in this prison, but this night, he spoke from his heart.

He had no inkling what a wave of Hell was about to break over the heads of the prisoners in a few hours. The entire British staff, falling-down drunk, wandered from cell to cell and beat, punched, and kicked anything that came between their fists and their boots, the whole night through. A night of much [...]

A Certain Type Must Be Eliminated

Verbatim quotation from an interrogation: 'We know very well that you and your friends weren't Nazis. But you're out of luck. You're of a type that we want to eliminate even more than we do the Nazis.'

It was the mill of collective guilt

But there were also God's mills, which grind slowly but surely what is cried to Heaven to spread it by rumor throughout the rest of the world. Prisoners who were released, spoke. And it became clear that in Nenndorf, things happened at the hands of the English that were as bad as, even worse than, since they were committed in the name of liberation and democracy, things for which Germans at Nuremberg were hanged or sentenced to prison. Many of the prisoners had been sworn to silence. But many were not silent.

The ball started rolling. The Catholic camp chaplain of Civil Internment Camp III in Fallingbostal, Vicar Magar, heard the rumors and sought particulars of another Nenndorfer, Mr. Parbel, which he immediately passed on to the bishop of Hildesheim. And within a few weeks, this venerated dignitary came to Nenndorf and held mass in full regalia and delivered himself of the most scathing condemnation of the torture huts operated by the Britons as described by several prisoners. He swore to relay the information in full force to Cardinal Griffy in England.

On the first Pentecost of 1947, the deputized member of Parliament Stokes stood at the door of Bad Nenndorf and demanded admittance. The British officers, feigning all innocence, had to let him in. The deputy went from cell to cell and made report of all. What he saw was enough: pitiful, beaten, half-starved, sick, intimidated, broken shells of persons.

On the same evening, the British guard staff, who had for more than a year plagued and tortured the defenseless, came on the run with friendly but distracted faces from cell to cell and shared out their own rations of cigarettes, chocolate and bon-bons. But the ball was still rolling...

Senior officers of the London constabulary Scotland Yard appeared and gathered evidence as to the conditions theretofore. They made no secret of the fact that they were preparing for a trial of the commandant and guard staff of the English interrogation camp [...]

Acquittal for the Torturers: 'I Didn't Know,' and 'I Followed Orders'

The trial in London went on and on. The defendants included the commandant of Camp Bad Nenndorf, Colonel Stevens, one of the most-brutal interrogation officers, First Lieutenant Langham, the camp doctor Captain Smith and some other offenders. It was embarrassing for Lieutenant Langham in that he was shown to be a former citizen of Germany. But much more was amiss. The commandant of the camp Colonel Stevens was let off on the grounds that he didn't know about the brutality [...] Even the sergeants Red-Eye, Henry VIII and Smiley were acquitted, and on no less than the excuse that they were just carrying out orders [...] The only sentence arising from the trials was that passed on Captain Smith. His sentence consisted of his being discharged from the British Army. It was no punishment, since Captain Smith was an old man, long ready for departure, long since not an active military doctor, and he fastened upon this basis for mitigation [...]"

Hinter den Kulissen der Nachkriegszeit

Der Dritte Grad

Behind the Scenes of the Postwar Period

The Third Degree

The Allies have finally agreed to a review of the sentences passed against real and supposed war criminals. Quick has moved at this time to publish this report so that the judges of these crimes, faced with the unconscionable implications of the decisions that lay in their hands, are made aware that not all the war criminals were German, but that judgment of such crimes depends essentially upon which side the criminals were on.

Introduction to the mentioned article in the German weekly magazine Quick of 1952, Vol. 5, No. 10, March 9, 1952, pp. 28–31.

After the trial in London, Camp Nenndorf was liquidated in August 1947.

Victor and Vanquished

The British co-victors exacted their revenge on the enemy in their fashion, whom they were able to conquer only with the help of foreigners and the sacrifice of their empire. It was the revenge of collapse. The conquered have long since absorbed the revenge and still bear the onus of the guilty. Since the “confessions” of those tortured not only in Bad Nenndorf but in many, many other places have formed the basis for the present comity among us, it is now considered very bad form to speak of that torture.

In the mud-bath house of Nenndorf, Hygeia has been cleansed, and the bathing huts have been restored to their original state. The screams of pain of its captives are long-since died away.

Died away to Where?

No seekers of cures come to Bad Nenndorf. It is quiet in the long halls of the mud-bath house. Seniors who practice their last steps with walkers on the promenade now occupy the clinics. Turkish boys now romp through the flowerbeds. Businesses are shuttered.

The ground on which the fatherland has rested since the end of the war is moldering. It even suffuses Bad Nenndorf with a foul odor that does not come from healing sulfur. Furtively, as though in the commission of a sin, the report of the Steinmeyer couple is passed from hand to hand.

Notes

First published in German as “Die britischen Folterungen in Bad Nenndorf” in: *Vierteljahreshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung*. Vol. 9 (2005), No. 1, pp. 14-19; translated by N. Joseph Potts.

[1] III A, Para. 5.

[2] The records of the Bad Nenndorf Civil Internment Camp are lodged, like all the records of the British military government, in London. In German archives is only an index to the available files that bear the appurtenant legend: *Akten der britischen Militärregierung in Deutschland*. editors Adolf M. Birke, Hans Booms, Otto Merken. German Historical Institute London of the Central Archive of Hannover, Lower Saxony, Munich, 1993. The following files are labelled Bad Nenndorf: 1. Vol. 7, p. 158, Entry 19784, *Civil Internment Camps, August 1946 – August 1947*, AZ: FO 1067 No. 79. Bad Nenndorf is mentioned here among other camps. 2. Vol. 2, pp. 67f, entries 3691 – 3702, *Assistant Inspector General, Public Safety, Report on Bad Nenndorf, Detailed Interrogation Centre, Contents of Mr. T. Hayward’s (Assistant Inspector General, Public Safety) report on Bad Nenndorf Detailed Interrogation Centre*. Ten individual reports follow this, all labeled *Report on Bad Nenndorf Detailed Interrogation Centre, File retained by department of origin*, AZ: FO 1030 No. 271– 282. The German administration records of the period contain nothing about Camp Bad Nenndorf.

[3] From “The Postwar Fate of SS General Oswald Pohl, Last Records”. *Historische Tatsachen* No. 47, Vlotho, 1991, pp. 35f.

[4] “Behind the Scenes of the Postwar Period: The Third Degree”. *Quick*. Vol. 5, No. 10, March 9, 1952, pp. 28-31.

Author(s):	Johannes Heyne
Title:	British Torture at Bad Nenndorf
Sources:	<i>Inconvenient History</i> , Vol. 10, No. 3 Fall (2018)
Dates:	published: 2018-08-06, first posted: 2018-08-07 02:29:46

<http://inconvenienthistory.com/10/3/5924>